

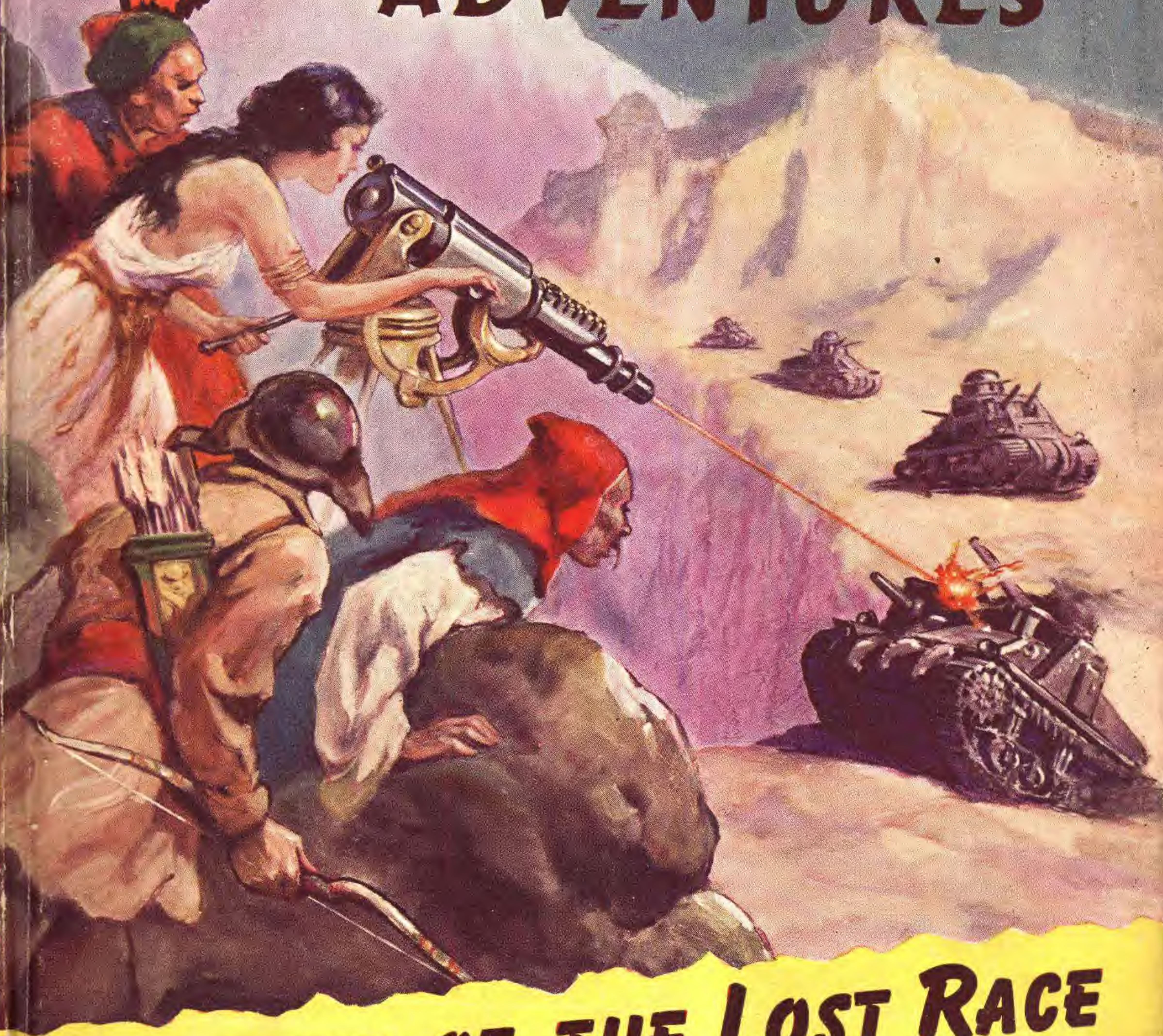
VOLUME 4
NUMBER 10

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES

The Leopard Girl by DON WILCOX

fantastic

ADVENTURES



MYSTERY OF THE LOST RACE
by **E. K. JARVIS**

OCTOBER
1934

OCTOBER 25c

fantastic

ADVENTURES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

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Front cover painting by J. Allen St. John illustrating a scene from "Mystery of the Lost Race"

Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul depicting "Perseus—Slayer of the Medusa"

Illustrations by J. Allen St. John; Magarian; Joe Sewell; Robert Fuqua; Henry A. Thede; Julian S. Krupa; Rod Ruth

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OCTOBER
1942

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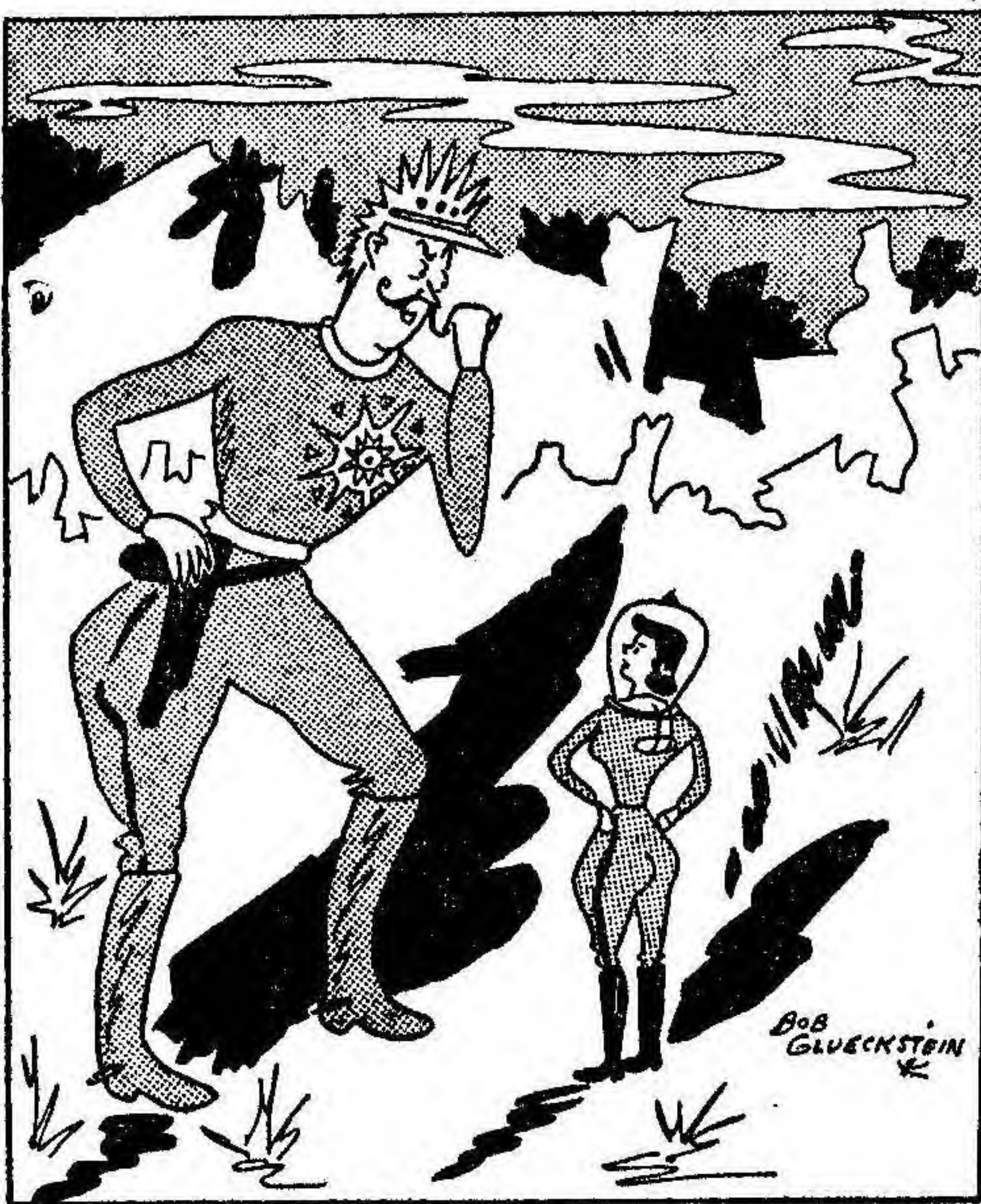
The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

ALTHOUGH Chicago is very hot as we write this, we feel rather good. We have an idea that this issue, as it goes to press is a pretty good one. We have a number of reasons to think this, and we'll skim through them hurriedly to give you a few tips.

FIRST, the cover story, by E. K. Jarvis, is illustrated by J. Allen St. John, famous Tarzan illustrator, both on the front cover, and for interior illustrations. We think this is a fine example of St. John art, and certainly a fine piece of work. Also, we are very well pleased with the story. Jarvis, although new to our pages, is a fellow we are sure you'll see again and again. He has a certain touch . . .

PERHAPS one of the finest fantasy stories we've read in many years is "The Leopard Girl" by the inimitable Don Wilcox. We use that word because we can't think of anything better at the moment. It's hard to think of words to describe the writings of Don Wilcox. Maybe we'll just not try, and let his own words speak for themselves. We think you'll "hear" plenty from this story.



"I know, don't tell me. You eat little girls like me!"

THE illustration for "The Leopard Girl" is by the popular Magarian duo, and we think it a fine piece of decorative art. Sometimes we think it is a shame we can't present the original in the magazine itself. These drawings are incredibly brilliant and delicate, and are worthy of gracing the spot of honor in an art gallery. Frankly, many of these drawings grace your editor's walls—both at home and in his many country estates—oops, who said that! Well when we do have country estates, they'll grace said walls.

FOR many months now we've been receiving letters requesting us to repeat famous stories of the past, fantasy classics that have received much acclaim in other years. Many would like to read them again, others missed them, and want to read them. Since most of these stories are out of print, our only recourse is to accede to demand, and publish them once more.

ACCORDINGLY, as a new feature of this magazine, we are instituting a new department called "Fantastic Classics." Each month, until further notice, we will present a famous story of the past. A fantasy that has lived in the memories of readers of this type of literature.

AS our initial "classic" we present Ross Rocklynne's famous "The Empress Of Mars" which was originally published in the very first issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, in May, 1939. We feel sure that the many letters we have received requesting this story certify its right to be called a "classic" and to be the first story to be presented as such. When you have read it, write us again concerning it, and give us your selections for future "classics" for our new department. It's up to you. We'll give you those famous stories you most want to read again. And to you newer readers, we guarantee that each story thus published will be the finest fantasy of the past—and you'll remember it just as we do.

THE very popular little Martian detective, Oscar, returns after a long absence in this issue. He's back with a new adventure based on the Fort Knox gold cache, in "Double Trouble For Oscar." Incidentally, James Norman, his creator, is the proud father of a new son.

(Continued on page 182)

DOUBLE TROUBLE FOR OSCAR

by JAMES NORMAN

Oscar couldn't be in two places at once, and yet . . . Anyway, it meant danger to Fort Knox's gold

FOR the news-photo men it was a big assignment. They shot it from every angle: trick shots of celebrities stepping out of fine limousines; angle shots of military men and statesmen. Cameras clicked at the small, alert army of Secret Service men guarding the entrances and windows. In the checkroom they even aimed cameras at the rows of shiny silk top hats—toppers which covered the most important heads in Washington.

Bill Pine, the lanky, energetic *World* photographer grinned as his lively eyes swept the long reception room. "Boy! A bomb under here and you'd blow up the whole Allied Nations Board of Strategy," he exclaimed.

"Not with me around," I answered confidently.

I'm Oscar, the Martian Detective. That is why I answered Bill Pine with such confidence. I'm no detective in the ordinary sense. Since coming to this planet, I've been glorified—like





Wimpy—and that is why the newspaper men hung around me during this elite reception which followed one of the most important meetings of the Allied Nations' Board of Strategy.

Newsmen like Bill Pine knew that if any trouble occurred, I'd be in on it instantly. It's because of my nose. But I'll explain about that later. Men like Pine also know that I make good copy, trouble or no trouble. You see, a Martian detective is enough to provide contrasting relief for people who have read too much about impossible eight-legged, saber-tooth planetary monsters or have seen too much of detectives looking like the Thin Man.

I'm not at all thin, but when I pull myself up to my full height of four feet five inches I'm really a dapper little fellow. My legs are quite stubby and I'm said to resemble a penguin, being a bit wide at the bottom. I've got ordinary hands though, and skin tougher and more porous than yours—bullet proof, in fact.

Here, at this Washington gathering, it was really my nose that kept the newspapermen around. It is kind of tulip-shaped, with a flare at the end, something like a public address system loudspeaker. When there is trouble in the air, it twitches.

Bill Pine was watching the crowd and color in the elaborate room. His gaze had wandered toward the far alcove where my companion, Hodar the Magician, was preparing an informal show of legerdemain. Hodar had just pulled back his sleeves and was showing a coin to Secretary of Treasury Frazier and to a smoothly beautiful dark-haired girl at his side.

It was then my nose began fluttering. I sensed an atmosphere of impending danger and my nerves grew taut, prepared. "Pine!" I said abruptly. "Let's move. Something is wrong."

My sensitive nose had located the danger zone as being near Hodar. Pine and I headed toward the alcove, pushing past the countless numbers of people gathered in the reception room. As we neared the alcove I caught a glimpse of Hodar waving his hand, signaling someone near the light buttons on the wall. Abruptly, the alcove lights blinked out.

A SECOND later they flashed on again and I heard a scream. What followed, seemed packed in an instant of time. Secretary of Treasury Frazier rocked slightly on his heels, staring in my direction queerly. Then he collapsed. I noticed the look of horror which swept Hodar's face and saw the dark-haired girl drop to Frazier's side.

"Pine," I shouted. "Close off the alcove doors. Get one of the Government men in. Quick."

"Where's Doc Wingate?" I heard Hodar call.

An elderly man with very abrupt, almost military mannerisms, shoved in past Bill Pine. He was Dr. Wingate at whose apartment Hodar and I were staying in Washington. He was followed by a Government man.

The Government man drew the girl away from Frazier's limp body. "All right, Miss Frazier," he murmured.

Wingate stooped over the body for a moment, then looked up, shaking his head.

"Dead," he said. "Bullet entered from the back, struck the spinal column, shattering the nerve system." He stared sternly at the news photographer, Pine. "You'd better arrest that man," he said abruptly.

"Me?" Pine gasped.

The dark-haired girl, Lana Frazier, held back her tears while sudden anger and doubt suddenly showed within her eyes. "You!" she cried staring at Bill Pine.

The cameraman stepped back, confused.

"I'm sorry, Miss Frazier, really. But I only . . ."

"Pine was with me," I interrupted. "He can't be held responsible. Considering the angle at which the bullet entered Frazier, Pine was in the wrong place. If he had fired the gun, Frazier would have been shot from the front."

"I never had a gun," said Pine.

The Government man, an efficient, well put up person, suddenly tapped Bill Pine's pockets. Abruptly, his hand dipped into the photographer's camera satchel and brought forth an object which left the photographer aghast.

"A silencer," snapped the Government man. "Where's the gun?"

"I tell you, I didn't have one," Pine protested. He was utterly confused now and his mouth grew taut with anger.

"Better come along," the Government man advised.

After they had taken Pine away, I turned to Hodar and Dr. Wingate, saying, "You'd better return to the apartment and wait there. I'm afraid this isn't going to be as clear cut as it looks. I'll take Miss Frazier home."

As the car drove into the funnel of its own headlights and curved beyond the Capitol Building, finally sweeping along Maryland Avenue toward Anacostia, I watched the girl as she sat in the darkness beside me.

She guided the car with a reckless vehemence which gave proof of the emotional strain she outwardly covered so well. Already, my sensitive tulip nose had given me a clue as to the cause of this emotion. I knew that Lana Frazier was troubled by something deeper and more complicating than simply her father's sudden death.

The car swung into the suburban darkness of Benning Road, its tires

screeching and piercing the stillness of the night. It was then that I broke the silence hanging between us.

"Miss Frazier," I asked, tentatively. "What about the cameraman, Bill Pine?"

THE girl stared at me, startled. The ivory-like soft sweep of her cheek showed in the dashboard light. So did her uneasiness. "What about him?" she countered.

"You're angry with him," I ventured. "You acted as though you knew him. In fact, I think you're in love with him."

Lana Frazier gasped and her fingers tightened on the wheel. Then she laughed coldly. "You've been reading too much," she answered.

"I'm afraid not," I said. "My nose told me."

I quickly raced through a bit of personal history for her benefit, explaining how Martians like myself never use sound for speech. At least, I didn't until I came to Earth. On Mars we use—odors. That's not so bad if you know how to apply them and aren't indiscriminate about such things as Earthmen often are.

Our Martian salt-cellar-shaped bodies are loaded with more glands than the average Earthman would dare carry. We're walking file systems for glands and we have perfect control over all of them. With such control it is simple to converse without making a sound. We convey thoughts by odor frequencies.

"So you see," I told Miss Frazier. "Your thoughts or feelings send out minute electrical impulses which stimulate different glands. My tulip nose is like a recorder. It catches those odor-sounds. To me they said that you were both angry at Bill Pine, and in love with him."

"What if I am?" the girl replied candidly. "Bill and I have been secretly engaged for three months."

"Secretly?" I lingered over the word.

Lana Frazier nodded. "Dad doesn't approve of me marrying a newspaperman." The girl realized what she had said and caught her breath quickly, glancing at me. "No. Bill wouldn't have killed Dad over that," she said.

I turned the conversation, making a routine suggestion. "Did your father get many threatening calls?"

The girl shook her head. "Everyone liked Dad," she replied. "Oh . . . He did receive a strange note this morning which worried him. It was a code, but I don't think there was any threat in it."

"I'll have to see it," I said.

The girl agreed. For the next few minutes we were silent. I had a queer feeling that something strange, fantastic and violent was about to occur. It was an odd, suspended emotion which had no relation to fear. We Martians know no fear, but nevertheless, it chilled me as though a long, hairy-legged spider had crawled up my spine.

CHAPTER II

Golden Code

WE were met at the door of the Frazier mansion by a young man of medium height. He was round-faced and had sharp, calculating eyes. He was also slightly bald; a habit Earthmen develop at an early age and to me, one of the more curious customs of this planet.

"This is Phil Sheer," Lana introduced us. "Phil is Dad's private secretary."

Sheer stared at me suspiciously, then he took Lana's hand, saying, "I'm scrry, Lana. It was terrible about your father. They called ahead."

The frilled edges of my nose itched,

picking up some rather rampant sounds from Sheer's ductless glands. I was immediately aware that the young man was also in love with the girl—a kind of petulant, dissatisfied passion, like oysters out of season.

I followed them into the study: a large room furnished in light, angular modern comfort. Lana went directly to a wall safe hidden behind a swinging section of bookcase and soon her deft fingers twirled off the combination.

"How many people know it?" I asked.

The girl swung the small, circular steel door open. "Dad and I," she replied. "Here's the note," she added, handing me an envelope.

She and young Sheer stood close as I opened it and pulled out two sheets of note paper, one folded within the other. Glancing at the outer sheet first, I read:

To Secretary of Treasury:

Of national importance. Please consider it carefully.

—Sincerely, Alienette

I raised the note to my nose, sniffing it carefully for identifying odors. The letter had a very definite sound. It said something which I couldn't quite understand because Lana Frazier's perfume mixed with it. I looked at Lana and promptly blushed.

Finally, I took up the second note which read:

*Au 197.2 3.50 X 6.75 X 1.75 test
ok Somerset Final FKn 9.10*

Lana Frazier's pretty brow wrinkled. "I don't see what it means. It isn't a threat," she murmured.

"Doesn't seem to be anything," said Sheer.

My Martian mind, which can generally take a problem and reduce it to

its scientific factors and thus solve it, was completely puzzled here. This was no chemical or mathematical formula, I was certain. There were only two points on which I felt at all clear—the beginning and end.

"The *Au* is understandable," I spoke thoughtfully. "It's the scientific symbol for *aurum* or gold. Also, 197.2 happens to be the atomic weight for gold. I can't make sense from the remaining numerals, unless the final 9.10 is a date. Ninth month, tenth day. What is today?"

"September sixth," said Lana.

"And the final something will happen on the tenth," I added.

"What?" asked Lana.

"Don't know," I shrugged my salt-cellar-shaped body. "But whenever I run against something like this it's always bad. . . . Very bad. . . ." I looked at the girl, adding, "Your father had a lot to do with gold, didn't he?"

"He was Secretary of Treasury, if that's what you mean. He also owned shares in a marginal mine once," said Lana.

I WADDLED up and down the room, tapping one hand in the other while the girl and Sheer watched me curiously. "Marginal?" I murmured. Presently the house bell rang and a moment later a Negro servant appeared at the drawing room door. "Mista Pine, here," he announced.

I stopped short. "Pine? He's in jail."

"So you think, Oscar," I heard Pine's voice. The news photographer strode into the room. "I'm here, and it's legal."

"Bill—" Lana Frazier looked frightened.

"It's okay, honey," Pine grinned. "They dropped the charges. Oscar was right when they said the bullets came from the wrong direction. Now,

they've hauled in the Magician, Hodar, for questioning."

I fell back, stunned. "Hodar?"

"Yeah," Pine answered. "Sorry about that. You cleared me, only to put the finger of suspicion on your friend, eh?"

"They're crazy," I said flatly.

"Why crazy?" Pine asked.

"Because they're going to have to dig deeper to find who killed Frazier than merely arresting one or two men. They'll have to learn something about gold."

All three: Pine, Lana Frazier and Sheer looked at me oddly. "Gold?" they asked in unison.

I nodded and started for the door, grabbing Pine's arm as I went. "Listen," I explained, as we left the house. "You'd like to get a good story and you'd like to get clear of Frazier's murder, right? Well, we've got to work fast. First thing tomorrow you check at all the banks, brokerage houses and city directories. Keep your eye peeled for gold and for Somerset. I'm going to bed. See you tomorrow."

I AM not an early riser. Since coming to this planet I've discovered that good detectives sometimes stay up late, but they never crack an eyelid till noon at least. So the following day, it was not until noon that I awoke.

Dr. Wingate came in and he looked a little tired. He had spent a good part of the night working to free Hodar. Although I didn't know much about our host, he was a man with much influence in Washington and he was at least confident he had pulled the right strings.

Wingate brought me my usual morning Manhattan—a thing to pick any Martian up. He also left the morning papers. "Don't let them worry you, Oscar," he advised, bowing curtly before he left me alone.

Maybe the Doctor felt Martians

were not sensitive to criticism. He should have known better. The headlines in the paper were like a swift blow to the jaw.

OSCAR FLOPS ON NEW CASE TREASURY'S FRAZIER MURDERED

Official Washington was shocked late last night by the mysterious murder of John Frazier, Secretary of the Treasury, which occurred at a reception following an important Allied Nations strategy conference held here.

Frazier, a key figure in the American War Cabinet was shot down in the company of the sensational little detective from Mars, Oscar. Suspicion at the moment rests on Oscar's companion, Hodar, a professional magician who is being held by District police.

Full details of last night's crime are not available at present due to a tight censorship clamped down by police. One police official indicated developments, however, by stating: "Oscar is a detective. This is the biggest case he's seen. What's he doing? Nothing. Why? You figure it out."

The little Martian made his first appearance on Earth during a New York performance of his magician friend's show. The magician startled a blasé Manhattan audience by pulling Oscar, instead of a rabbit, from a tall hat. Oscar's subsequent career has been completely meteoric. Utilizing Martian techniques, he has solved one nationally important crime after another.

Tossing the paper aside angrily, I slipped from bed into my salmon pink robe and made a dash for the shower. I

was beginning to wonder if the papers were right. Was I slipping? The thought was as disturbing as that day in the past when the Government had me deported for a month on discovering I had entered the country illegally and there was no quota for Martians.

After the shower, I put on a new change of feather clothing, New York made, but modeled after the original Martian suit I had first come with. A little later some reporter came in and I released a statement.

"Who killed Frazier?" he asked.

"I don't know yet," I said. "But you have it on good authority that interesting developments will be forthcoming in the next twelve hours."

I smiled a little over this formula. It is something which Earth police are very fond of using in any pinch. The only difference was that when I issued it, it meant something to the press. The reporters raced out to make the afternoon deadlines.

By late afternoon, Bill Pine returned. He fished a sheaf of copy paper from his pocket, glanced through them then shook his head.

"There's too damn much gold in this country," he said. "I worked ten solid hours on this. It's mostly about gold mines in Alaska, the West and Mexico. None of them connects with Frazier directly."

"How about Somerset?" I asked.

Pine shot me an odd look.

"That was a queer hunch you had, Oscar," he grinned. "I located a Somerset Gold Survey Company. It's part of the National Gold Concern."

"Big company?" I asked.

"No. Pretty new. As far as I can find, they aren't listed as mine owners. They have land leases though."

I made a small clucking sound with my tongue for now I was really impressed. I also felt a bit anxious. There

seemed to be something peculiar, some underlying connection between the National Gold Concern and the death of Frazier. As yet, I had nothing positive to go on. It was just a feeling. And I had another feeling too.

Grabbing Bill Pine by the arm, I steered him toward the door. "Listen, man," I said. "Get over to Miss Frazier's. I think she'll need watching. Keep your eyes open while you're there."

Pine flashed me a queer glance, then went out without saying anything.

CHAPTER III

Little Man, Go South

WHEN Hodar was released on bail, shortly after supper, he came to the apartment and found me more or less in my cups. Martians like myself are not normally drinking men but this is one concession I make to my earthly profession. Furthermore, I just couldn't help myself.

I had been going over my notes and had happened to take a sniff of the letter signed—Alienette. Somehow, it made me feel terribly nostalgic. I became soft and pulpy, like an Irishman when he hears *Mother Machree*.

"Hodar," I murmured as my friend came in, "I've got a queer feeling something is going to happen. It's the nostalgia. I keep thinking about the fatherland."

"The fatherland?" Hodar blinked.

"Os-kan. Mars," I said. "Yes, every once in a while I get a whiff of the winds from off the Mare Cimerium. I lived there once, Hodar. You don't know what it feels like not to see little intellectual Martian kids playing around your door. I never felt like this before. I don't understand it. Maybe my time is up on Earth."

"What's gotten into your head, Oscar?"

I sat back in my chair. "Maybe I'll be whisked back to Mars, just as you jerked me out of that top hat in New York."

I could see Hodar grow pale. I knew that he'd miss me under any circumstances, but now he needed me as he had never needed me before. I just couldn't leave in the middle of a criminal case in which he was implicated. "Not right now, Oscar. Not in the middle of things," I heard him say.

The unhappy nod I gave him was interrupted by the ringing of the phone. I flipped up the receiver and listened to the vaguely familiar voice without quite placing it. I listened for a moment, then hung up and reached for my small silk topper.

"Bill Pine," I told Hodar, "wants me to meet him at some restaurant. You stay here and let no one in the apartment but Dr. Wingate."

While riding down the building elevator I tipped my hat politely to a blonde, then made my way to the street door where I paused for a second looking for a taxi.

Suddenly I jerked back, feeling my chest struck by an invisible blow, a whip lash as quick and hard as one of Joe Louis' lightning left jabs. A bare instant later I heard the rifle report reach out of the night's darkness.

One of the building elevator operators rushed toward me from the lobby. "What is it?" he asked. "Sounded like a gun."

"Sniper," I replied. "They made a mistake."

The elevator boy's mouth dropped an inch when he saw me shake my clothes and saw the bullet drop to the walk. It was as flat as a dime.

"You were hit," the boy gasped.

"Only on the surface," I nodded. "Don't let it worry you."

Finally the lad recovered suffi-

ciently from his surprise to remember something. He handed me a folded note. "It came early," he explained. "The other fellow forgot to deliver it."

I opened the note, then raised my Martian brows as high as they would go, reading:

Oscar—You have one hour to return our ledger. Watch out.

"Who brought it?" I asked the elevator boy.

"I don't know," answered the boy. He opened the door of the cab which cruised to the curb. All the while he peered into the darkness, worrying about the shot. I slipped him a dollar and said, "Call a cop and have him look for someone with a rifle out there."

Settling back on the cab cushions, I gave the driver his instructions, then let my mind play with the fast moving events which had just occurred. It was not difficult to tie up the attempted shooting with my interest in the Frazier case, or with the definitely threatening tone of the note I had just received.

But the note itself left me at sea. There was something definitely wrong here. Some awful confusion. What were the ledgers? I knew I didn't have any ledgers and still, someone wanted them badly enough to take a shot at me. I gave off a tired odor-sigh and half wished I might be returned to Mars.

THE Acropolis Cafe, where I was to meet Pine, was what you Americans call a "joint." It was a small place with a counter running its full, narrow length, which the cockroaches used as a race track. Behind the counter there was a sign saying, "R. Popodopolus, prop." Beneath the sign I saw Mr. Popodopolus himself: a heavy-set, kindly Greek with tragic eyes.

"No. I no see tall man come in," he answered when I inquired about Bill Pine. "Nobody eat here for hours. That is the trouble with Greek restaurant. Lose customer all the time." He slid a cup of coffee before me, then regarded my tulip nose sadly.

"The nose," he went on unhappily, "The nose is bad thing for my business. We got million Greek restaurant all over world but we got no business. You wanna know why? Because, garlic."

"Garlic?" I asked.

"Yeah, garlic. Americans no like garlic. I can no cook without garlic."

While listening and waiting for Bill Pine, I passed the time by putting my comptometer-swift brain to work. Borrowing a pencil, I quickly wrote out a formula on a paper napkin and handed it to the Greek.

"Send this to the Department of Agriculture," I said. "They'll fix you up. It'll mean a renaissance for hash-joints the country over."

The formula I had just tossed off consisted of simple, workable directions on cross-breeding garlic and onion, thus producing a new vegetable—garlion. It would retain the delicate flavors of the old two but would have no odor.

A few more minutes passed, then Bill Pine appeared. He was breathing heavily as he dropped upon the stool beside me. "Boy," he grunted. "You don't give a guy much time to cross town. What did you want?"

I stared at him in bewilderment.

"What did I want?" I said.

Pine's good looking face turned on me blankly. His forehead creased in a series of puzzled ridges. "You phoned me," he said.

I shook my head. Quickly realizing that something was amiss, I stood up and started for the door. Pine's

thoughts must have run in the same direction for his mouth hardened. "I've got to get back," he said. "Lana."

Pine left with the sudden impetuosity of a newspaper man in love. As for myself, I didn't waste time either. The phone calls which had drawn us together were clearly calls to get both Pine and me away from the places we should be.

Within the space of ten minutes I was back at Dr. Wingate's apartment and was anxiously fitting my key into the door. Remembering the sniper who had shot at me in the street below, I realized that I should have taken a moment to warn Hodar. But my uneasiness was soon relieved. Hodar was in the apartment, examining a huge pile of books which had been dumped on the couch.

"Anyone been here?" I asked.

"Wingate came and went a little while ago," said Hodar. "Just before you brought these ledgers."

"Ledgers?" I asked. "Ledgers—" the word struck a responsive chord in my mind. Again I heard the sniper's gun echoing and my fingers automatically reached for the note the elevator boy had given me. Hurrying to the couch, I examined one of the fat, canvas bound books. On its stiff cover was printed—NATIONAL GOLD CONCERN: TRANSACTIONS. It was enough to make me suck my breath in with utter surprise.

"Where'd you find these?" I demanded.

Hodar stiffened a little and shot me a worried look. "Where did I find them—" he exploded. "You brought them yourself about five minutes ago."

I STOOD there, gazing at Hodar as though he were mad. "The devil I brought them," I said. "I was with Pine, uptown. How could I be here

and there?"

"But I saw you come in," Hodar protested.

"Impossible."

For a moment the two of us just stood there, staring at one another. I could see the doubt in Hodar's eyes and I even began worrying about our respective mental conditions. Perhaps the strain of these last twenty hours was beginning to tell.

Suddenly Hodar leaped to my side. "What's wrong, Oscar? Are you sick?"

I was still holding the ledger book when I suddenly felt myself go faint. It was that feeling of nostalgia coming back. For the space of a minute or two I suffered the strangest interplay of emotions, an utter sense of loneliness.

"The nostalgia," I murmured, feeling the feverish warmth of my forehead.

"You look like you're mooning," said Hodar.

"It's the odor from the ledger book," I said at last. "Hodar, I've got a queer feeling that something is going to happen to me soon. There seems to be some fantastic connection between the nostalgia and every bit of new evidence I get. Maybe I *am* going to disappear."

"Nonsense. The United States can't spare you."

I realized this only too well and made a strong effort to control myself. As I opened the ledger book to glance at its contents, I had to shut my tulip-shaped nose to the memory arousing odors the book seemed drenched in. Actually, I felt like a Frenchman sitting in a concentration camp, hearing an English radio play the *Marseillaise*.

Finally getting down to business and inspecting the books, I found them full of name lists and, oddly, very little about gold mine transactions. Two notations aroused my curiosity however. One was that the Gold Concern had

purchased a large stock of explosives as well as arms. The second was that the concern had bought a strip of land for experimental purposes. The land was somewhere near Somerset, Kentucky.

"But why buy land there?" Hodar asked speculatively. "There's no gold to speak of in Kentucky or Tennessee. It's wild region, but mostly limestone."

I shrugged my drape-shoulders thoughtfully.

"We're going to Kentucky," I said. "When Dr. Wingate comes in, ask him to make the arrangements."

"Hunch, eh?" Hodar asked.

I nodded. "Yes. Frazier's death isn't an ordinary case," I said. "I know the signs. Somerset links up mysteriously with the code Frazier received and with the National Gold Concern. Hodar, we haven't much time. We've got to explore this Gold Concern."

Tossing the ledger book back on the couch with the others, I stared at the pile worriedly. These, also, were a problem. How had they come here? Whatever thoughts I may have had about this angle were suddenly pushed from my mind when the doorbell began ringing frantically.

Hodar answered it and a moment later Philip Sheer burst into the room. His face was smeared with blood, his clothes torn and he was gasping for breath as he dropped on a chair and stared at me wildly.

"Sheer! What is it?" I demanded. I was at his side instantly.

"Kidnapped," he said, between drags on his breath. "Lana . . . kidnapped."

"Where's Pine?" I snapped.

Sheer got control of himself. "They got Lana," he repeated. "A blue limousine . . . came to the house . . . machine-guns. Four men took her . . . I tried to stop them and they knocked me out . . . I saw Pine in the limousine."

CHAPTER IV

Plot for Panic

THE temporary headquarters Dr. Wingate located for us in Kentucky was a fine old estate in a blue-grass valley completely hemmed in by wild, picturesque hills. We arrived at mid-day, following a hurried overnight flight from Washington to Louisville by plane, then by car to Cumberland County.

The ride was not all pleasantness however. Both Hodar and Wingate were put out by this sudden change of scene. Hodar was aghast that I should leave the capitol while Lana Frazier was in the hands of the kidnappers. It had been shocking enough to discover that Bill Pine had been one of them.

"I was afraid this might happen," I told Hodar. "The only way we'll find the girl is to rip this entire case wide open. I think our being down here will do it."

As we drove up to the rambling Southern mansion which was flanked by huge white colonnades I forgot our problems for the moment. Looking at the estate, I was at once aware of why Scarlett O'Hara had trouble with her men. It must have taken an army of men to support a Southern gal in the manner to which she was accustomed.

"It takes money to practice Southern chivalry on this scale," Hodar explained.

I didn't quite understand what he meant. I had always imagined chivalry was a matter of heart. On Mars the people in the Northwest region have two hearts pumping in their bodies, and their rate of chivalry is much higher than, for example, my own.

Our talk of chivalry lasted only a little while. I, for one, refused to be sidetracked. During the remainder of

the afternoon I studied geologic and road maps of Kentucky and the surrounding states, hoping somewhere I might find the key with which to solve the bewildering tangle of details arising from Secretary Frazier's murder.

I sent Hodar off to the town of Somerset to check up on the office of the Gold Concern there and he returned quite late, reporting they were closed. It looked as though I was getting nowhere—then the afternoon papers from Louisville were delivered.

What I saw in the papers almost caused me to faint. My eyes fairly leaped over the scare headline and plunged into the body of the article while both Hodar and Dr. Wingate crowded around me.

"It's a trick," said Hodar.

"Gag? Nothing!" I gasped. "Look at that headline."

SECRET GROUP PLOTS TO GRAB U. S.

September 8 (Exclusive)—A startling, nation-wide plot by which a powerful and still unrevealed group plans to seize control of the United States Government was revealed to the editors of the Louisville Dispatch here this afternoon as a result of the discovery of an amazing document. The named document, it is said, is scheduled to be handed to a secret emergency session of Congress, Friday, Sept. 10th. (Photostat of document on page two.)

"Great Martian Saints," I murmured. My fingers felt as thick as a handful of baseball bats while I excitedly turned to page two. "Here it is!" I ran my finger along the printed copy of the document.

To the President and Congress

of the United States: This country is now on the brink of a catastrophic financial panic. Our representatives will present proof after these demands are read. Only the NGC can prevent a complete and total collapse of the government and the economic structure of the country. Our demands are as follows:

- 1. Immediate withdrawal of the United States from the war.*
- 2. That satisfactory peace treaties be completed with the individual Axis powers.*
- 3. That Lend-Lease and other aids to the Allied Nations be ended immediately.*
- 4. That the American Armed Force be reduced in size (to peace time limitations) and that strict secrecy be maintained. That the people of the nation shall not be warned of these changes until we see fit to make such an announcement.*

"LORD!" Hodar's voice was shocked and vibrant. "So this is what's behind the Frazier murder."

I quickly turned back to page one which I had scanned hastily, and now went over it with more care. In the middle of the lead article I got the worst shock of my life. There it was—in black print:

. . . The original document, now in the hands of the FBI, was delivered to the Louisville Dispatch office this afternoon by Oscar, the Martian Detective, in person. (See picture, back page.)

I felt as weak as though someone were hacking at my legs with a fireman's axe. Hodar grabbed the paper and turned it over to the back page.

That was the final blow. There was only one picture there and it covered the entire page. I stared, absolutely unable to believe my eyes. There I saw myself, dapperly sitting on a desk. A bluff-featured man wearing a celluloid eye-shade was shaking my hand. The caption beneath the picture read:

Oscar, the Detective of Mars, receiving congratulations from Editor E. M. Willis during his visit to the Dispatch office this afternoon.

Suddenly I let out a despairing "gurg" and staggered across the room to a mirror and stared dazedly at my reflection. Yes, I was still here. At least, I was in the mirror. Somewhat reassured, I turned toward Hodar and gazed at him suspiciously.

"Is this your idea of a joke?" I demanded.

"Joke?" Hodar looked blank.

It was clear that my friend was as confused as I was. No. This wasn't any of his theatrical magic at work. It was something worse. "But I'm in two places at once," I mumbled. "That can't be."

"It's a hoax," Dr. Wingate put in. He was as upset as the rest of us for he and I had been together the entire afternoon. "I'll get in touch with the paper," he said.

"Wait a second," I cut in as something began to stir my more rational thoughts. "This business connects up too well. Don't you see. Frazier's death linked with the National Gold Concern led up to Kentucky. Then, all at once, the Louisville, Kentucky, papers spring this business and mention the NGC—National Gold Concern."

"Nonsense, Oscar," Dr. Wingate shook his head. "I can't picture a single company, particularly a gold

company getting control of the American government."

"But is it a gold company?" I asked.

I began pacing the floor, my hands clasped behind me, my Martian brow wrinkling fretfully.

"The document threatens a gigantic panic for America," I said abruptly. "How do you engineer a panic? Have there been other ones?" I looked at Hodar.

My magician friend nodded. "Panics," he said thoughtfully. "Well, the 1929 breakup was bad, but not catastrophic. There was a much worse panic in the '90's during the Cleveland administration. If I remember rightly, the country was saved from complete collapse when a group of financiers offered the government unlimited gold credits."

"Gold credits . . . Gold!" I snapped at the idea.

"But we've probably got the biggest chunk of world gold supply right now. It's a pretty solid foundation for our economic house at the moment," Hodar countered.

"What if the gold supply was stolen or destroyed?" I asked.

"There'd be a panic all right," Dr. Wingate nodded.

I brightened, carrying the fantastic idea onward. "It's simple," I explained. "Threaten the gold reserve and the government is secretly blackmailed into complying with any demands the Gold Concern wants. The people won't know it happened until it's too late."

Ignoring the doubtful looks Hodar and the Doctor cast at me, I went to the table which contained my maps and notes. "Look," I pointed out. "The Frazier code—I've got the answer! *Au 197.2 3.50 × 6.75 × 1.75 test ok Somerset Final F Kn 9.10.* You know what that means? Listen—Gold 3½ inches by 6¾ inches by 1¾ inches, test

okay in Somerset, Final at FKn September 10th."

"What are the inches?" Hodar asked, puzzled. "And what is the *FKn*?"

I could feel my own excitement growing.

"The inch figures together make up the exact dimensions of the gold bullion bars cast by the Mint for the U.S. Gold Depositories." I ran my finger toward the northwest area on my Kentucky map, saying, "*FKn* in the code might mean, Fort Knox, America's greatest gold storehouse."

Dr. Wingate looked pale around the gills. His trim figure looked as though it had taken a severe beating. Hodar appeared even more shocked.

"Destroy Fort Knox—" he gasped.

"That's what it looks like, doesn't it?" I said grimly. "If I'm right experimental tests were probably made in the hill somewhere between here and Somerset. Now they're set for the final blow. It'll be Fort Knox with bombs or something."

CHAPTER V

The Ingot Fortress

THE night's darkness was flooded with a strange, animated emotion as our car roared along the highway which wound across Kentucky like a huge, twisting ribbon.

Hodar, Doctor Wingate and I had left the house shortly after midnight, bound for Fort Knox. The suspense and anxiety that rode with us in the car had already been built up to grating tension by the fact that America was on the alert. We were delayed a number of times by highway patrols who questioned us. In each town we picked up new snatches of reports on how the police in larger cities were

rounding up suspicious groups.

But even in these "minute mea" precautions there existed a certain bitter irony. The country had been warned, in fact, shocked into action, just as on the day of Pearl Harbor; yet, only Hodar, Wingate and I knew how or where the blow would fall. Furthermore, we were the only ones who knew of Bill Pine's connection in the case, whatever his role might be. I wondered what his ties were with the Gold Concern.

And we had other worries also.

"They've been exposed now," Hodar said, his face drawn with the same overlapped tension that gripped each of us. "But they might try to get at Fort Knox before the tenth."

He jammed the gas pedal to the floor, giving vent to his fear that an attempt to destroy the fort might be timed for any moment.

I glanced at my watch. Five o'clock. In less than an hour we would be at the fort. Already, a faint tinge of yellow and blue edged between the hill-broken horizon and the darker sky. I watched the dawn unfold, making out the features of the landscape, the rugged country and the single road that led to the fort itself.

At length we drove past the gateway of the Government Reserve and approached the fort headquarters. Hodar and I went in and I presented my credentials as a Martian detective to Major Starr, the officer in charge. The Major, a square shouldered man with a face as hard and solid as America itself, watched us oddly as we explained our mission.

"You think they'll try getting at the gold, eh?" he shrugged, a half ironic smile on his mouth.

"That's what it adds up to," I replied.

Major Starr took my arm and prac-

tically propelled me from the headquarters and pointed toward a squat, two storied, solidly constructed building.

"You're a clever man, Oscar," the Major smiled. "But look at that. It's the gold vault. I'll show you through, then challenge you to figure out a way to walk off with Uncle Sam's bank roll."

We headed across a well-kept lawn toward the imposing fortress. The place did indeed give me the impression of impregnability with its heavy concrete bastions, machine-gun turrets and military guard stationed every so many feet.

"This isn't all," the Major explained. "It's absolutely bomb proof. The walls are steel, coated with layers of concrete. Their thickness is a Treasury Department secret. I don't even know. If you think you can drill through the concrete you'll run into the steel which shoots off a deadly gas soon as a blowtorch or drill touches the plates."

"Tunneling?" I asked.

The army man laughed. "No chance," he said. "The walls of the inner vault where the gold is kept are pinned on bedrock. A seismograph touches off an alarm system if anyone explodes anything nearby or dry-mines."

ENTERING the fortress, Hodar, the Doctor and I followed Major Starr like school kids on an educational tour. The Major waved his hand toward a group of working men who were laying in pipes from the treasure vault to a pumping building some distance away. A soldier stood guard by each man.

"Plumbers," said Starr. "We're finishing the flood control defense. In case of danger we can flood the gold room in three minutes. That plus anti-tank guns, machine-guns, concrete, steel, gas and water makes us pretty tough to crack. If you're around to-

morrow we show you a full defense test; everything in action."

"How much gold is there?" Hodar asked.

"Treasury Department secret," Starr stated. "The only release ever given out was that the first shipment brought here was over ten billion dollars. Lot more here now."

"Are you sure it can't be blown up?" I asked.

The Major smiled. "Positive. You can't beat the fort. If anyone tries to walk out with gold he's got to pass through a brigade of soldiers. Fort Knox is surrounded."

After leaving the gold vault we continued our tour of inspection, taking in the communication center, the army barracks and the pumping house which drew from the Ohio river and could dump a few hundred thousand gallons of water into the gold fort within a few minutes. Although feeling more at ease, I was still puzzled. I knew there must be some way in which the Fort could be cracked. I've been around Earthmen long enough to know that they've never built anything which one of their number cannot destroy. It was my job to find the weak spot.

"Well?" asked Major Starr as we ended the inspection, "think you can beat our defense?"

I shook my head slowly. A new, uneasy doubt crept into my thoughts. Had I made a mistake in figuring out the code? Did it mean something else? It must have because even my lightning Martian brain couldn't figure out a way for an Earthman to get at this gold.

Glancing at Hodar, I said, "I think we'd better go back. I've slipped somewhere . . . I know! Somerset!"

Somerset was another good five hours drive back over the same road we had come during the night. But this time Hodar and I went alone. Dr. Wingate

went on to Louisville in an army car to investigate the *Dispatch* story which by now was appearing in papers throughout all the country.

In spite of the sunny warmth of the day, I remained in a peevish mood. I even believe I was angry because the Treasury Department had built its gold depository so solidly. I felt that at last I, Oscar of Mars, had run into a case that had me stopped. The run back to Somerset was my final desperate chance to make some sense out of the mystery.

It was while filled with such thoughts that we drove into the Somerset region, a heavily wooded, hilly area as primitive as in the days of Dan Boone.

Our car whirled past a thick patch of woods when suddenly I heard four rifle shots, one upon the other. At once, the car wobbled madly, swerving from road-edge to road-edge. "Tires," Hodar shouted. "They're all flat."

"They were shot," I answered.

Hodar glanced at me as the car halted, then past me. He had a very queer expression on his face. I turned, following the startled sweep of his gaze until I saw *them*.

AT FIRST, I wasn't sure whether they were Earthmen or not. There were two of them—perhaps the strangest creatures I have yet seen on this planet. They were tall, extremely thin and they peered at us with their shoe-button black eyes. I noticed that they wore a kind of drooping straw head cover which also shaded their long, horse-like faces.

"Mountaineers," said Hodar.

I watched their feet now and was even more amazed. They went shoeless and their toes were as flexible as fingers. Both of them carried long rifles which seemed to be as much a part of them as their bare feet.

"Mountaineers," I repeated appreciatively. I didn't realize at this moment how much I would come to admire these Kentuckians. I was soon to find that they were the cream of American manhood.

The two mountaineers approached the car, keeping the rifle muzzles centered on us in a most careless fashion. "Yuh folks is thim revenooers we been expectin ta shoot, ain't cha?" said the first one.

"Revenooers?" I was puzzled.

"Revenue agents," Hodar whispered. "The mountaineers declared war on the Department of Internal Revenue a few generations ago and they've never been conquered."

One of the mountaineers, the more talkative one, drenched a crawling spider some four feet away with a deadly accurate gob of tobacco juice. He said, "We hain't shot at revenooers fur about a year. Bout time more come snoopin around. Yuh is thim, ain't yer?"

"No. Do I look like one?" I asked.

Both mountaineers shook their heads. The talkative one drawled, "Wal, if yer ain't it's no use ta shoot yer. Me, I'm Clem. This here," —he pointed at his companion— "he's Eb. Yuh sure yer ain't from the Martin clan?"

Hodar reassured the two that we were New Yorkers.

"Wal," said Clem, "Guess mebbie yuh better foller us. The boys hain't never seen any Nooyawkers. Kinda appreciate it."

They motioned us to follow them. The drawling order was punctuated with a casual nod from their rifles. Hodar flashed me a quick glance, implying that we had better follow. Although anxious over being delayed, there was nothing we could do but humor these men.

They marched us through the hills for a half hour and at last, we came to an open space beside a creek. My gaze swept past the crude log cabin there to a clearing where some fifteen men, all looking exactly like our two escorts, were busy around a huge, enclosed copper vat.

"Scientists?" I said quickly.

"A still," Hodar replied. "They're making White Mule."

The rest of the mountaineers gathered around us curiously as we entered the circle. Naturally, they were keenly interested in me. I was the first Martian they had ever seen. Not wishing to let them down, I preened myself, showing off my dapper penguin-shape and fluttering my tulip nose.

"Nooyawkers," explained Clem.

In a very short time we were all fairly friendly. Of course, it took a little diplomacy to break through the innate suspicions of these people, but Hodar did the job by performing a few minor feats of magic such as converting his watch into a small size cream separator.

TO SHOW that they weren't to be toyed with, a few of the mountain men gave us an exhibition of plain and fancy shooting. Clem's shooting was particularly eloquent. He whipped out a long horse pistol, spread the toes of his right foot and without the slightest hesitation or taking any aim, fired a bullet between each toe. Not a particle of skin was grazed between them.

He looked up at Hodar and down at me while the pistol's smoke curled up the barrel. "Thot thar might be ants down thar," he drawled.

"You ought to be in the army?" Hodar suggested.

"Ain't no need," said Clem. "Ain't no war."

"Sure there's a war," Hodar replied.

"Who we fightin'?"

"The Axis."

Clem scratched his head. "Is they an enemy?"

Hodar nodded.

Clem looked at the other mountaineers and said, "Boys, yuh hear that. T's nother war. We gotta join up afore it's too late. We'll finish off the Mule, then git on ta Washington and tell 'em we're ready."

The men cheered, fired a couple of shots and crowded around the still while one of the men drew off the Mule into jugs. To a Martian like myself, White Mule is something phenomenal. It has all the effects of high test gasoline and none of its subtleties.

I took one sip of the stuff, then abruptly dashed Hodar's jug from his hand. My sensitive nose caught a definite, alarming odor. "Don't drink it," I warned him. Then I shouted at the other mountain men.

It was plain my warning came too late. The mountaineers were consuming enormous quantities of White Mule and enjoying it.

"What's wrong?" Hodar asked.

"Trichloride," I answered. "A deadly poison. Can't you smell it?"

Hodar grew deathly pale. Then his expression turned to one of amazement as he pointed at the mountaineers. "Look," he gasped. "The colors."

The mountaineers were still drinking but their faces began to turn various shades of livid purple, orange and yellow. This, I knew instantly, was the result of trichloride in certain chemical combinations. It had become a dyeing agent. But the thing which most amazed me was that these men were apparently enjoying themselves to their fullest.

"Men can't drink that stuff and live," I exclaimed.

"They can," said Hodar. "They're

doing it. It proves what's been said about their cast iron stomachs."

Something else began bothering me, now that my first moments of shock and amazement had worn away. I cornered Clem. Being very curious as to why they flavored their drinks with trichloride, I asked, "Listen, Clem. Do you folks turn colors often?"

"Nope," he replied, the color of his face receding to a pale lavender. "Just happened on the last two batches we pulled. I think maybe the water done it."

"Water? From where?" I asked quickly.

He jerked his thumb toward the narrow creek which ran below the cabin. There was but a light trickle of water in it and it wound away through the vivid green brush. It was then that my Martian intuition went into action.

"Come on, Hodar," I shouted. "The answer to the Frazier code is up this creek."

CHAPTER VI

Secret of the Code

TOGETHER we plunged through the brush, following the upward bends of the creek. The mountaineers scarcely noticed that we had disappeared they were so preoccupied with the opportunity of joining the army. I went a little ahead of Hodar, bending almost double so that my sensitive tulip nose could pick up the faint odor of trichloride.

"What's the creek got to do with the Frazier code?" Hodar asked once while I paused, sidetracked by another odor which turned out to be a cow spoor.

"Who knows?" I replied, starting off again. "But there is a connection. You know what trichloride is?"

Hodar remained silent.

"Some day I'll tell you about science," I murmured.

The trichloride trail was quite vague. It was as though it had been dumped into the creek a few days ago. Small deposits of the stuff had snagged along the creek banks, but with my nose, an odor, no matter how elusive, is never lost. I followed the tart scent for a half hour, then abruptly climbed the creek bank and went to the left. Presently I saw a glass-lined pipe which extended from the bank, back into the thick brush.

"It came out through this," I said. "Pipe needs a glass lining to carry trichloride. We'll follow it."

The new trail led us a short way through the woods and to the edge of another clearing. Suddenly Hodar grabbed my arm and jerked me down behind cover.

"Someone in the cabin there," he whispered.

Peering ahead, I saw the log cabin. A heavy-set man lolled in the sunlight near the door. He had a light machine-gun on his lap. "Must be others inside," Hodar added, pointing toward the slow curl of smoke that came from the cabin's chimney. "I'll go back for the mountaineers," he suggested.

I held him back. "No. Not now," I whispered. "We can't waste the time."

"They're armed."

"That's nothing," I replied thoughtfully. "I've got an idea."

I pulled a tiny gadget, an extremely thin platinum diaphragm, from my pocket. Hodar stared at it curiously—and no wonder. It happened to be something no man has ever seen on Earth because along its thin edge was printed the phrase, MADE ON MARS. I had it in my pocket that fateful day when I had found myself transplanted from my Martian home to this planet.

As yet, I had had no occasion to use it.

"What's that?" Hodar asked.

"Voice Dispersion."

Fitting the flexible platinum diaphragm snugly over my tulip nose, I began talking through my nose much as a Frenchman does. The results were, of course, amazing. Hodar almost collapsed when he heard and saw the results.

To my friend's astonishment the nearby woods filled with a gigantic assortment of sounds, bugle calls, tramping of many feet and grinding tones remarkably like those made by tanks. It was as if an army brigade was moving up on the log hut. Orders rang out on all sides:

"Company tenshun . . . Squads left . . . Lieutenant, sight your cannons . . . light machine gun company, enfilade . . . cover doors and windows . . . sappers . . . stand ready men . . ."

THE guard at the hut's doorway leaped to his feet, threw aside his gun and plunged into the cabin like a frightened rabbit. Almost at once, someone within the cabin cautiously poked an arm out the window and waved a white flag.

Again I vibrated the platinum nose-piece. Another order rang out from across the clearing.

"We accept your surrender. Throw your weapons into the clearing!"

Hodar's eyes fairly bulged when two more light machine-guns, an assortment of pistols and some brass knuckles sailed out the cabin door and clattered on the hard ground. I pushed Hodar ahead. "Now we've got guns," I said.

Arming ourselves hastily, we pushed into the cabin and found four frightened men. While Hodar tied them, they sent worried glances toward the door as though they expected the entire United States Army to move in with all its

wrath. That took but a moment. I now turned to another door which led to a small storeroom and pushed it open.

"Miss Frazier! Bill Pine!" I suddenly cried out.

I saw them both—man and girl. They were lying upon a straw matting and both were bound and gagged. It took but an instant to slash the ropes holding them. The look Lana Frazier blessed me with as I finished untying Bill Pine was one I shall never forget.

"Thank God, Oscar," the girl murmured, swaying to her feet a bit unsteadily. Suddenly she collapsed into Bill Pine's arms and I felt kind of foolish for I had hoped she would fall my way, even if I am only half her size. Didn't I rescue her?

"It's okay, Oscar," Pine grinned. "Strain has been tough on her. How'd you know they grabbed both Lana and me at the same time?"

"Phil Sheer," I said.

The next moment or so seemed quite delicate. Pine was busy teaching the girl this American custom of fastening one pair of lips over the other and getting fun out of it. I turned my eyes aside and politely surveyed the prison room.

It was really a makeshift laboratory. Bottles of chemicals lined a shelf, retorts and scales stood on a nearby table. A pipe led from an experimental basin, through the log wall to the outside and toward the river. This was the trichloride route.

The rows of chemicals set my mind working.

I grabbed Bill Pine's hand and slipped a gold signet ring from his finger. "Don't ask me why," I said. "Just give it to me and clear out. I want to be alone for a while."

A laboratory is the nearest thing to heaven as far as I am concerned. For the next half hour I worked as though

in a trance. I snooped from bottle to bottle of chemicals, allowing my sensitive Martian nose to absorb odors which to me are sounds.

There were some very interesting combinations here. A mixture of hydrochloric acid and two parts bromine sounded like a scorching *boogie woogie*. The most interesting smell from a connoisseur's standpoint was one I found in a brown, elegantly designed bottle marked *Four Roses*. It sounded like a well harmonized version of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "The Wearing o' the Green."

In fact, it even tasted good.

Toward the end of my operations Hodar came in.

"Pine says these Gold Concern people really have a way of getting at the Fort Knox gold," Hodar explained. "He couldn't hear much except that they'll do it tomorrow. The four we captured are just gangsters. The real people are still at large."

I ended my experiment with a satisfied sigh and went into the next room with Hodar. Ignoring Hodar's worries, I said, "I've just discovered what this house was used for. It was a testing place to dissolve gold in. I just did it to Bill's ring."

"Dissolve gold?" Hodar asked, perplexed.

"Sure. They dissolve gold with *aqua regia** and drain it off into the creek through the glass-lined pipe as trichloride, or soluble gold."

"Fort Knox!" Hodar's eyes were wide.

"Right," I answered. "It's so simple it's criminal. *They'll destroy the gold in the Fort by dissolving it*. Somehow the Gold Concern people got in at the

Fort's flood defense system. They'll drain the gold off into the Ohio River so it will be almost impossible to regain it. Even Major Starr won't know until it's too late. You see what that means? It will disrupt American economy, wreck our war production schedule."

"Oscar—," Hodar's voice carried a strange impact. "Tomorrow! Remember, Major Starr said they were going to test the flood defense tomorrow morning!"

THE late afternoon sun shot its rays sharply across the driveway of the mansion which was our headquarters when Bill Pine, Lana and I marched our four prisoners toward the house. Hodar wasn't with us. He had been sent back to contact the Kentucky mountaineers.

"Bring the prisoners in," I ordered Bill and Lana while I raced ahead.

Bursting into the house and reaching the drawing room, I stopped short. My eyes swept the half dozen men in the room. They were all very important looking and well dressed, but somehow, they didn't quite seem American. They also seemed surprised at my coming. Then I saw Philip Sheer standing near Dr. Wingate.

Both the Doctor and Sheer were staring. But not at me. Their eyes were fixed on the four gangsters Bill Pine escorted into the room. "Friends," I beamed.

"What'll I do with them?" Pine called to me.

"Hold them," I said as I hurried toward the phone in the library beyond. "I'm calling the Fort."

"Wait!" Philip Sheer's voice snapped at me harshly. "Don't touch that phone."

I halted abruptly, seeing the revolver in Sheer's hand. No. I wasn't frightened by Sheer's clipped tone, nor by the

* *Aqua regia*—a corrosive, fuming yellow liquid made by mixing nitric acids and hydrochloric acids, 1 to 3 by volume. Through the action of the chlorine it liberates, gold is dissolved and converted into trichloride.—Ed.

thinned down cast of his lips. His gun was not levelled at me. It was centered upon Lana Frazier.

The girl had gone pale. "Phil, what's happened?" she cried.

Sheer ignored the girl's frantic plea and flashed me a quick, dangerous glance. "Not one move, Oscar," he snapped. "You're wanted by the F.B.I."

CHAPTER VII

Double for Oscar

"THE F.B.I.?" Bill Pine cut between Sheer and Lana. "Cut it, Sheer," he said angrily. "Before Oscar's through they'll be tacking medals on him."

Suddenly Pine's mouth dropped. He moved his eyes slowly around the circle of men in the room. Each one now carried a gun and they were all centered on Lana, Pine and myself. I saw Pine's fingers relax as he let his own gun drop. "Good God," he protested, "you can't do this. Not now."

"I'm afraid they can, Bill," I interrupted. "Sheer isn't holding us for any F.B.I. He's here to keep us from warning Fort Knox!"

"So clever, eh?" Sheer spoke in a clipped, precise tone that was almost foreign.

"Great guns!" Pine gasped, his eyes open at last.

"I wouldn't be too surprised," I told Pine. "All together, this is the National Gold Concern. A fancy front for Axis agents in this country. Dr. Wingate, I don't know what his real name is, is head of the Concern. And Sheer—just another Nazi agent. A clever one. I think it was his idea to flood the gold vault at Fort Knox with *aqua regia*. He was in position, as secretary to Frazier, to hand-pick the plumbers at Fort Knox. They put in glass pipes, screwed

up the flooding system to take acids in instead of water."

"*Halt dein munde!*" Sheer snapped.

I heard Lana Frazier draw in her breath incredulously. She stared at Sheer, in a dazed, horrified manner.

"I'm sorry, Lana," I murmured. "Sheer fooled a lot of people. So did Wingate."

"Did he—" the girl hesitated.

"No. He didn't actually kill your father," I answered quickly. "Your father was murdered by Dr. Wingate. Sheer knew your father had gotten the mysterious code. Afraid that your father might discover its meaning, he called Wingate. The doctor was at the reception in Washington and he shot your father. When he pushed past Bill Pine at the door he dropped his gun-silencer in Bill's pocket."

Philip Sheer waved his pistol impatiently. Turning to Dr. Wingate, he spoke rapidly in German. I didn't understand entirely but I got the idea that they were worried about Hodar who wasn't with us.

Then Bill Pine said, "Sounds like they're going to shoot us."

I saw the look of horror run into Lana Frazier's eyes and then caught the movement of the Gold Concern men as they moved toward us. Lana cringed back.

"Grab them," Sheer shouted.

Abruptly, a rifle shot cracked outside in the twilight. The glass in one window tinkled, shattered. One of the Gold Concern men let out a painful cry as his gun went spinning across the floor.

A second shot crashed nearby. I heard the bullet zip past my head and neatly clip through Dr. Wingate's vest, cutting his suspenders away. The Doctor dropped his gun and grabbed frantically for his pants.

Rifles shot in from the outside at a terrific rate. Bullets zipped everywhere

within the room. The Gold Concern men dropped their weapons and slid to the floor to avoid the fury of those death-spined bullets.

Bill Pine and I stood there like idiots. Never had we seen such shooting. Object after object in the room shattered like clay pipes in a shooting gallery. Pictures crashed to the floor as their wires were cut. A chandelier in the center of the ceiling lost each of its crystals without a single electric bulb being touched.

Shooting with such telling accuracy could only mean one thing. The word was on my lips in an instant. "Mountaineers," I shouted to Pine.

A moment later the fireworks stopped. I snatched up the Doctor's gun and covered the Gold Concern men. "Okay, get up," I said. "Back against the wall." Meanwhile, I saw Bill Pine singling out Philip Sheer. Sheer was in a violent rage when suddenly Pine's fist lashed out.

"A pleasure," Pine grunted as the impact jarred from his fist, down through his arm to shoulder and body. Sheer stiffened momentarily. His eyes looked glazed and foolish. Suddenly his knees buckled and his body crumbled to the floor.

"Beautiful." The compliment came from the doorway, and both Pine and I turned in time to see Hodar run in. A number of lean, button-eyed mountaineers followed him.

I was on the verge of crying out happily when, all at once, my voice thinned out and my eyes suddenly bulged as I stared at the small, dapper, tulip-nosed figure who came in beside Hodar. It was me—or was it?

My whole body trembled and I blinked my eyes incredulously, trying to clear my vision while I stared, aghast. The figure was still there—four foot five, feathered Martian clothes,

penguin shape, salmon skin *and, that tulip nose!*

Hodar now gaped at the other figure and at me, open mouthed. Bill Pine, Lana and the Gold Concern men wore the expressions of people who had lost their grip on reality. I just couldn't stand it any longer. Handing my gun to Bill Pine, I shut my eyes tightly and promptly fainted; the first time I had ever tried this on Earth.

IT could have been an hour later or, perhaps, only a few minutes when my eyes fluttered open again. I felt around and knew that I was flat on my back and feeling something like Joan of Arc—I heard voices all around me.

Something strong gurgled down my tulip nose and I sat up abruptly, pushing aside the mountaineer who was siphoning a jug of whiskey into my nose. On my left I noticed the other Martian figure holding my hand tenderly while Hodar knelt in front of me.

Hodar still looked bewildered.

"Which of you is Oscar?" he asked anxiously.

"I am," I said. I blushed a little, feeling the touch of the other Martian who held my hand.

"I'm Oscarette," added the other Martian.

"A Martian, too?" Hodar asked.

Oscarette nodded and fluttered her tulip nose demurely. I knew instantly that the newcomer was a lady Martian. Doing things demurely with our noses is something which only lady Martians can do.

"She's a she," I muttered weakly.

Hodar gulped. "I thought she was you, Oscar. I met her outside when I came up with the mountaineers. She said there was trouble inside the house."

With a lady Martian around, I recovered quickly and was soon on my feet, though still holding Oscarette's

hand. I felt as though I were walking on balloons. "How'd you get to Earth?" I asked her.

She made a delicate series of odors.

"No," I explained, "you must talk in sounds for these Earthmen."

Oscarette smiled lovably and lowered her lids apologetically for Hodar. Both Hodar and I held our breath, half fearing that some other magician had pulled her from a top hat. If it could happen twice, it might occur overy time someone put on a show of magic.

"I don't know how I came," Oscarette replied in sounds. "Perhaps it was because I was interested in this Earth planet where everyone uses sound for language. I only remember listening to some radio-wave-interceptions from Earth. The waves grew stronger, then everything went black."

"But how did you arrive?"

"Everything remained black for a long while," Oscarette continued. "I seemed to be inside some metal cartridge. A very large one. Then someone with a leather bag opened the giant cartridge and I found myself on Earth. The Earthman who opened it, fainted."

"It wasn't a vehicle?" Hodar asked, relieved that the top hat theory was eliminated.

"No. It was stationary," Oscarette smiled again. "It had letters stamped on the outside metal. They read—U.S. MAIL."

"A mailbox!" Hodar wiped his brow and sat down abruptly. Just then Lana Frazier and Pine joined us. They were holding hands, just as Oscarette and I were. Pine had already discovered the detailed plan for draining the gold from Fort Knox on one of the Gold Concern men and he had called Major Starr at the Fort to warn him.

I looked at Oscarette again. "No wonder I had nostalgia so often," I mused. "I sensed Oscarette. She sent Frazier the Gold Concern code and the message signed, *Alienette*. She also brought the Concern's ledgers to our apartment in Washington."

"And the plot business to the Louisville papers," added Oscarette.

"But how'd you run into this? You were a complete stranger in the country." Hodar asked.

Oscarette let out a delicate responsive odor, then quickly corrected herself. "A gift," she said. "Didn't Oscar tell you? We Martian women have an unusually delicate sense of balance and mentality. It's like a tuning fork. When anything within our perception range is out of balance with its normal environment, we are jarred by it. While I was in the metal cartridge you call a mail box, I was sitting on a letter which jarred me. That was the code I sent to Secretary Frazier. The contents of the letter were out of harmony with everything else I sensed in America."

"What a homicide squad she'll make!" Bill Pine commented with amazed respect.

I, Oscar, should have felt a little insulted at this, but I wasn't. I was too preoccupied with Oscarette. She had pinched my hand for an instant and was now moving toward the French doors leading to a large outside verandah. Beyond them I could see the larch trees rippling in the soft Kentucky night.

Reaching the doors, Oscarette turned, sending me a glance that shot my blood pressure up. She stepped out on the verandah and somehow, I knew I was falling in love with the way her buncy Martian hips moved.

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